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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

July 10, 1941

Subject: "HOMEMADE AIR-COOLERS AND SHOWER BATHS". Information from the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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You can't argue with the "weather man". So we might as well attack the summer heat problem from another angle. Somehow we feel more in the mood for doing something about the heat when it's hot anyway.

Farm Security borrowers of the U. S. Department of Agriculture often try to cool off with homemade shower baths and simple air-cooling systems in their homes. Today these families report to us on how they make some of their own equipment.

In Western Kansas, for example, a farm woman and her husband "air-conditioned" their little two-room house. They visited the junk yard in a nearby town and picked up a couple of discarded automobile fuel tanks. One of these they put over the kitchen window and the other they put over the bedroom window. Then they went to the drugstore and got some waste excelsior. At home they picked up some lumber scraps and pieces of hail screen. With these they made two thin frameworks and filled them loosely with excelsior.

They placed one in each window below the coolers. They connected each framework, and the coolers or old fuel tanks, with small copper tubing. Finally, when they filled the tanks with water, the water flowed through the tubes, dripped through the excelsior, and the natural circulation of air through the wet excelsior lowered the temperature of the room. Of course, it wasn't easy to fill the coolers from the well every day, but the farmer filled the tanks in the cool of the morning and didn't have to do it again all day. . . .

Most people like a shower for cooling off in hot weather - particularly after a long day's work in the field or over a hot cookstove. Many health authorities say a shower is really better than a tub bath because it doesn't have the weakening effect of a long tub bath. It may be a bit hard, though, to have a shower bath when

you don't even have running water. But a lot of farm families have found it entirely possible and practical.

A man in Holmes County, Mississippi, for example, didn't let lack of running water or plumbing fixtures keep him from having a shower bath. He simply took an old oil drum, welded a spigot to it, and attached a sprinkler. Now he says the sun heats the water and a twist of the wrist turns it on. But it isn't as simple as it sounds. It would be hard to make one from that short description, wouldn't it?

An Arkansas farmer goes into a little more detail about his shower bath. He says he first made a rough framework from several poles and set a washtub on top of it. Then he soldered a secondhand nozzle or spray to the bottom of the tub, and connected the tub with the hand pump on the back porch by means of a garden hose. He made a shower curtain from an old wagon sheet, though another material would have been as good. Now when someone wants a shower, he or one of his young sons supplies the "water power" by simply pumping water through the hose into the tub. The shower operates easily and the whole thing costs less than a dollar, because the farmer used mostly pick-up material.

Engineers in the U. S. Department of Agriculture suggest a simple "bucket shower" for homes without running water. They say bucket showers are easy to build, practical to operate, and cost very little. First you decide where you want to set up a shower - like a small room in the house, the back porch, or some shed or other building on the farm. Then take a four-to six-gallon metal bucket. Cut a small hole in the bottom of the bucket and solder the big end of a funnel over the hole. Attach about six feet of rubber hose or tubing to the small end of the funnel and fit a perforated shower head on the other end of the tubing or hose. The shower head can be a regular shower head, or a sprinkler from a sprinkler can, or simply a tin can with small holes punched in the bottom.

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To make a shower curtain, take some old canvas, burlap, wagon sheets, or cheap material from a dime store, and sew them together to about the size of 70 by 100 inches. Hem the curtain strongly at the top and perhaps make little cloth tabs around the top of the curtain. Then fasten the curtain by means of the tabs to a heavy wire loop like you see around barrels, or use other strong heavy wire for a loop about 30 inches in diameter. Attach the curtain tabs to the loop by sewing them, or using regular curtain hooks like you can buy very reasonably.

Still another idea is to sew heavy cord or strong cloth strings to the top of the shower curtain, and tie the curtain to the rim of the hoop. The reason you hem the curtain - or even double-hem it - is to keep the tabs from pulling out or tearing the cloth when the curtain is heavy with water. To hold the curtain in place or in a steady position on the hoop, run four wires at regular intervals from each other around the edge of the hoop and fasten them in the center to the screw hook in the ceiling.

To elevate the bucket for the shower bath, fasten a rope to the bucket handle and run it through a pulley fastened to the ceiling. For safety's sake, don't put the pail right over the spot where the bather will stand. Fasten it a little to one side, and let the hose slant or curve outward to reach over into the shower curtain. If you locate the shower in the house, set a large wash tub under the shower for the bather to stand in. This kind of a shower bath can be made for less than a dollar. In fact about 90 families in one Kansas county got interested in bucket shower baths and made them for 55¢ apiece. They bought their material and equipment cooperatively, which helped reduce the cost.....

Well, I hope some of the suggestions you have heard today will help you "cool off" this summer. If you didn't follow all the directions for making an air cooler or shower bath, you can probably get them from the Farm Security supervisor or Extension agent in your county. Or perhaps you may write to the station to which you are listening.

